Andhra Jyothy□s casteist offence?

The Andhra police arrest three journalists under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, a month after the alleged offence. Sourced from C.S.H.N.MURTHY and other reports. Pix:The editor being taken away.

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On June 24 the Hyderabad police arrested the Editor of *Andhra Jyothy* Mr. K.Srinivas and two reporters at night. The arrests came after a prolonged discussion with the police in the newspaper office on the validity of the arrests. The police maintained that legal opinion had confirmed that there was a prima facie case against the three journalists.

A blank editorial appeared the next day on the paper□s editorial page with a notice pasted on it: How to write an editorial with hand-cuffs. The three were detained under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

The provocation for these arrests stemmed from the fact that on May 26 *Andhra Jyothy* published a story, entitled "Hired leaders" in an apparent reference to the leaders of Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS) headed by Mr. Manda Krishna Madiga. Though the article did not make any insinuations about the Madiga caste per se (one of the sub-castes falling under the Scheduled Caste Categories), the article purportedly referred to some of the recent agitations of MRPS leaders as □hired agitations□ and described the leaders as □hired leaders□. The article also castigated the main leaders of MRPS for being stooges of chief minister Y S Rajshekhar Reddy, launching agitations apparently at his behest.

The MRPS leaders led by Manda Krishna Madiga are primarily demanding division of SC castes into A,B,C and D categories. Their main allegation was that most of the SC posts were corned by a single SC community-namely Mala□which is a predominant community among SCs in Andhra Pradesh. Though there are Ministers hailing from both the Mala and Madiga communities in the State Cabinet, Manda Krishna Madiga□s demand for categorization of SCs is from the angle of demanding an equitable approach to all the categories and subcategories of Scheduled Caste communities.

In keeping with the demand of MRPS leaders, the Congress State Government, appealed to the Centre to appoint an inquiry commission to look into the demands of MRPS leaders. Accordingly the Central Government appointed Usha Mehra Commission, which after conducting a protracted enquiry with a number of sittings across the State, concerning the status of all subcategories of SCs in the State, recently submitted its recommendations to the Prime Minister. (Mehra Commission begins its public hearing: http://news.indiainfo.com/2007/07/15/reservation_ap_commission.html). However, the rival Mala community, its Ministers and leaders opposed the Usha Mehra Commission on the basis of the judgment of the Supreme Court that such categorization of SCs is anathema to the spirit of reservations. (Malamahanadu Flays the Usha Mehra Report: http://www.thehindu.com/2008/05/07/stories/2008050753420400.htm). During the four years past, MRPS leaders went on frequent hunger strikes and everytime when they went so, the government would send its Ministers and community leaders to cajole the MRPS leadership with some assurances and sops. It had become more or less a refrain and routine for the both sides. Aside this, MRPS leaders also organized a hunger strike and dharnas at several place for the enhancement of monthly allowances to the physically handicapped and socially deprived.

As soon as the article appeared in *Andhra Jyothy*, the MRPS leaders under the leadership of Manda

Krishna Madiga attacked the news paper office located in Banjara Hills. They tried to attack its managing director Vemuri Radha Krishna but in the process several scribes were injured. They broke the furniture, windows and other infrastructure in the news paper office while raising slogans against the management and *Andhra Jyothy* per se.

The entire media was stunned at this attack on the paper and the subsequent vandalism they (MRPS) carried out. They burnt the effigy of Vemuri Radha Krishna right in front of Andhra Jyothy office. On the complaints lodged by the management of the paper, the Jubilee Hill Police registered cases of vandalism, destruction of property and stress pass against the MRPS leaders including its leader Manda Krishna Madiga. Though the Chief Minister condemned the attack on Andhra Jyothy in principle, he also criticized the write up of Andhra Jyothi as irresponsible journalism. Whereas Media organizations condemned the attack on *Andhra Jyothy* from across the state in one voice, the intellectuals and academia conducted a conference immediately at Press Club and requested the leaders of MRPS to desist from such attacks. They appealed to MRPS leader Manda Krishna Madiga to air his condemnation of such write ups in a democratic way. In the course of the protests against the violent attack on the Andhra Jyothi and its staff including journalists and the managing director, a former scribe, the protestors which include the staff of *Andhra Jyothy* burnt the effigy of Manda Krishna Madiga and and allegedly attacked it with chappals.

The leaders of MRPS proclaimed that the write-up was an offence against the scheduled castes. They filed cases against the management of Andhra Jyothi and its reporters for burning the effigy of their leader Manda Krishna Madiga. They even threatened the Chief Minister that if he did not order for the arrest of these members of the Management and its Editor under SC and ST atrocities Act, they would launch a state wide agitation.

It looked initially like the CM did not take the warning of the MRPS leaders seriously. But, suddenly a momentum picked up and MRPS leaders met the Home Minister Jana Reddy and DGP Yadav in a series of quick developments. A month after the alleged offence three journalists were arrested.

The Editor of *Andhra Jyothy* was considered a prime accused according to the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Jubilee Hills for he was found, in one of the photos taken that time by the media, slapping the effigy of Manda Krishna Madiga before it was set ablaze. It therefore amounted to atrocities against SCs and STs. The Editor, after initial resistance for a few hours, ultimately surrendered and was sent to police custody till July 8, 2008. When media organizations throughout the state began to protest, the CM conducted a review meeting. The police officials assured the CM that the arrests were very much within the ambit of law.

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